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By ing NARA Date 7-30-96

6 June 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WITH THE
PRESIDENT. Saturday, 6 June, 10:45 a.m.

NOTE: Detailed memorandum on the conversation which took place being prepared by Mr. Colby.

1. Secretary McNamara reported on the shoot-down of a Navy reconnaissance plane, the fact that the pilot was observed parachuting and had sent out radio signals and he had landed in an area infested with Pathet Lao. Efforts to retrieve him had failed and had been ordered stopped because of darkness. McNamara then recommended that a reconnaissance mission of two planes be sent out tomorrow, that it be accompanied by 8 fighter bombers, with orders to return fire if the reconnaissance planes were attacked.
2. The President then asked the opinion of each of the Chiefs. All expressed agreement with LeMay and Greene, favoring fighter-bomber operations prior to the reconnaissance flight. Wheeler and MacDonald were studying the Secretary's recommendation. The differing views were reconciled along the lines of the McNamara recommendation.
3. Rusk then was asked his views. He said that he felt the reconnaissance flights had been a deterrent to PL operations, that they should be continued to the extent "necessary and essential in developing photographic reconnaissance required by the situation". He opposed excessive flights and he opposed "loitering" to gain visual observation of villages, encampments, etc. With this restriction, Rusk agreed ^{to} the reconnaissance flight tomorrow with fighter-bomber accompaniment and orders to return fire.
4. The President then said that he questioned whether we had thought through where we are going; specifically he said, "and what comes next?" This question - the most important question raised in the meeting - remained unanswered.
5. The President then asked my opinion. I stated that it was probably true that the reconnaissance flights had ~~effort~~ caused the Pathet Lao North Vietnamese to act with restraint. However I noted their limited time for military actions which involved going forward aggressively for a

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short period, pausing and then withdrawing was typical of PL operations and probably due to ^{more} logistic and support problems, ammunition shortages, etc., than to such considerations as our overflights. With respect to the McNamara recommendations, I supported them without hesitation or reservation.

6. The Attorney General likewise supported the recommendations.
7. The meeting adjourned.

I then met briefly with Forrestal and asked if he had researched the SEATO Agreement and the extent to which we could lean on it if we wished it to commit actual war. Forrestal agreed to review the Treaty and the obligations over the weekend.

I then met privately with Bundy and posed the same question to him. I said that the problems of securing a Joint Resolution were most serious as it would involve a debate on the Floor of the Senate which would probably be violent and corrosive to U.S. policy position. However in my opinion the commitment of ground troops to Laos would cause consternation throughout the country and the debate on the Hill infinitely more violent than the one that might arise over a Joint Resolution as outlined by the Attorney General. I said it would surprise me if several important Senators such as Russell and Saltonstall would not severely criticize the commitment of troops to Laos and that I felt a sampling of public opinion at this time would indicate that not one person in 50 favored such commitment. I pointed out that all of the "hardboiled spokesmen" such as Goldwater, Nixon, Rockefeller (to a lesser extent), and even Symington had advocated air strikes and envisaged our boys flying back to base in safety after having deposited their bombs on North Vietnam or elsewhere. I therefore viewed with great concern the consequences of the actions which we were "drifting into" and I wished Bundy to express this view to the President. Bundy agreed to give the President a brief memorandum.

I then told Bundy that I would send him a letter giving him my views on the Clifford report; essentially the Clifford report had pointed out the importance of the DCI's responsibilities in reconnaissance matters and the importance of preserving the "cutting edge" of CIA. Having done this, they turned around and made a series of recommendations which left the

DCI with no authority over the program and the CIA with no participation except through the sufferance of the Secretary of Defense. Bundy said he expected this reaction from me. He would look forward to receiving my letter, and this was an issue in which the President would have to make a decision after hearing the views of the parties concerned.

Bundy then brought up the question of CIA re-entering South Vietnam in an active role such as that which had existed prior to Operation SWITCHBACK. I said that we would put our maximum effort into this providing the CIA role was clear, was *ordered* by a Presidential Directive and agreed to by both McNamara and Taylor. Otherwise we would continue "in support" as we had. I told him that a very professional, well-run operation developed by CIA over a period of several years, despite the continual resistance of the MAAG in Saigon, had been completely liquidated and lost as a result of Operation SWITCHBACK. CIA had predicted this, they regretted it, but to try to inject themselves back into the picture would cause a frightening interdepartmental quarrel unless the plan was enthusiastically endorsed by the President, SecDef, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Bundy asked that we draft such a Presidential Directive; however, before submitting it I feel that interested parties, General Carter, Kirkpatrick and others, should meet to establish a firm Agency policy position.

cc: Gen. Carter
Mr. Helms

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